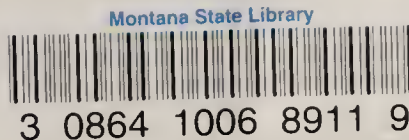


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STATE DOCUMENTS

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-11

Chief Joseph Battleground of the Bear's Paw

April 14, 1972

Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department
Recreation and Parks Division
Helena, Montana

MONTANA FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

CHIEF JOSEPH BATTLEGROUND OF THE BEAR'S PAW

I. Purpose

The Chief Joseph Battleground of the Bear's Paw is the scene of the final battle and surrender of Chief Joseph and a band of Nez Perce men, women, and children which culminated a 1,700 mile retreat through some of the ruggedest country in the west. The project is designed to preserve the battlefield in its present condition, interpret the battle and the retreat of the Nez Perce and provide minimum facilities for a small day use area.

II. Description of the project

The battleground is located sixteen miles south of Chinook adjacent to a county road. The Fish and Game Department obtained a deed from the federal government for 160 acres in 1959. An additional 40 acres was obtained from a private landholder in 1968 making a total of 200 acres containing the major elements of the battlefield. The adjacent county road provides easy access to the site from Chinook.

Proposed developments include an interior road and parking areas, picnic tables, fireplaces, one latrine, a well, interpretive devices, and a foot trail. The installation of the facilities is designed to provide a minimum of environmental intrusion. In addition, some site restoration will be undertaken. Promiscuous roads and trails which now form a reticulate pattern over the area will be restored to a natural state by spreading topsoil and reseeding to native grasses.

III. Description of Existing Environment

A. Human Resources

The battleground is located in Blaine County which has a population of 6,727. It is in a rural area with nearby farm dwellings at a density of approximately one per four square miles. Chinook is the county seat of Blaine County and has a population of 1,813. It is the nearest community to the site.

U. S. Highway No. 2, a major east-west highway in Montana, goes through Chinook. Visitors from out-of-state that are traveling this highway often visit the battleground.

B. Physiography and Geology

The project site is located in the northern plains area of Montana. The surrounding area is devoted to wheat raising and cattle ranching. There is a small oil field to the west of the county road between Chinook and the battleground.

The land is gently rolling with the main thrust of the Bear Paw Mountains approximately 35 miles south.

The battleground is located on low ground with gently rising bluffs immediately to the east and south. Snake Creek enters the site from the southwest and leaves the site along the north boundary.

The Claggett formation predominates throughout this area and consists of dark gray shale with iron stained concretions. Sandstone is present locally with bentonite beds occurring near the base of the formation.

C. Land Use

The land included in the project has been under the administration of the state park system since 1959. Prior to that time it was administered by the Bureau of Land Management. During these many years, the land has not been used for agriculture or grazing. There has been some indiscriminate grazing on occasion when loose cattle have wandered into the area from the adjacent county road. Such use has been minor and has not created a problem with the site.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Snake Creek traverses the site but it is small and intermittent in flow. It does not have value as a fishing stream.

On occasion there may be a few antelope that stop and graze on the site. There is a lack of necessary habitat and only occasional visits are made by these animals. The same is true for upland game birds.

E. Vegetative Resources

The site has not been grazed and, as a result, the vegetation on the site is quite lush and rank. It consists primarily of native grasses with some sage brush on the bluffs. Along the creek there are patches of rose bushes and snow berry bushes.

F. Climate

The battleground is located in typical northern plains climate. The temperature during the summer months will range

as high as the 90's with cool nights. In the winter the temperature will drop below zero and blizzards will sweep the area. Snow depths are generally shallow although drifts may accumulate along the bluffs and the brush patches.

G. Transportation Systems

There are no roads, trails, railroad or other transportation media in the project location. A county road running south from Chinook is located adjacent to the west side of the proposed developments on the battleground.

H. Utility Systems

There are no utility lines or systems located within the boundaries of the project.

IV. Evaluation of Environmental Impact

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

The project does not include any construction or other influences that will affect the water quality, atmospheric quality, erosion, deposition or sedimentation. There will be a disturbance to the grasses and forbs on the interior road alignment and parking areas and along the foot trails. Such disturbance will be minor and is designed to eliminate indiscriminate driving and parking that now exists on the site.

The interior roads, parking areas and traffic control devices are designed to provide a minimum of interference to scenic values and vistas.

The roads and parking areas will be gravel surface. The road widths will be twenty feet with additional widening to sixty feet in the major parking area at the interpretation center. The parking areas in the day use area will be twenty feet in depth. Any topsoil that has to be removed will be used to cover some of the roads and trails that have been created by random driving. Cuts and fills will be minor. Backslopes will be covered with topsoil and reseeded. The roads and parking areas will be constructed with four inch gravel surfacing.

The interpretive panels at the interpretation center and along the trail will be mounted on rocks with a low silhouette and will compliment the site. Two wind screens with benches will be constructed at the interpretation center for the convenience of the visitors.

A water well will be drilled in the day use area on the terrace near the creek. A hand pump will be provided for public use. Care will be taken during drilling and developing of the well so that the ground water will not be polluted. Drill cuttings will not be allowed to enter the creek but will be contained and disposed of off the site. The well will be cased

and grouted and the pump mounted on a proper seal to prevent entry of surface water into the well.

One double latrine will be constructed in a low site and will serve both the day use area and the interpretation center. This unit will have a fiberglass sealed vault which will be pumped as needed with the effluent disposed of off the site in a legal manner.

New fencing will be constructed to enclose forty acres that have previously been fenced out.

Overnight camping will not be permitted in the area. There will be some day use in a designated area as indicated on the plan.

From the interpretation center the visitor will have an unobstructed view of the battleground. The trail system will have interpretive markers that will provide information on the battle. Site number six on the trail will have an interpretive marker and a vista point of the battleground. The surrounding landscape will also be included in the view from the overlook point. Existing, randomly located monuments will be moved to the interpretation center. Other existing facilities considered to be intrusions will be obliterated to restore the area as much as possible to a near natural state.

The site does not possess a wilderness quality.

It is not anticipated that there will be any health or safety hazards in the area.

B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

The project is considered to have a minimum of adverse environmental effects. It is recognized that public use of the area will result in some litter problems, vandalism, dust and other problems associated with public use. Good maintenance and administration of the facility will minimize these problems.

C. Alternatives

An alternative to the proposed development would be to eliminate all construction and leave the site in its present state.

The Battleground of the Bear's Paw is one of the most significant sites in the entire campaign and retreat of the Nez Perce Indians from the Lapwai country in Idaho enroute to what they considered a safe haven in Canada. It has been retained by the Fish and Game Department for the purpose of

making it available to the public and of interpreting the battle along with other events of the Nez Perce flight. If left in its present condition without proper facilities and care, the site will only deteriorate and the preservation of this important and significant area will be denied.

D. Short Term -- Long Term Use

During the construction period there will be minor environmental intrusions on the site. These intrusions will be present for a very short period of time. There will be some dust, construction equipment and materials stacked as necessary for the facilities.

When the construction work has been completed, the site will be opened to visitation by the public. The facilities proposed should handle the public use for many years. Additional facilities may be installed in the future if visitor use warrants such additions.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The construction of roads and parking area will disturb approximately 1 to 1.5 acres of ground. Such commitment is not considered irreversible as the developments could be obliterated and the area restored to its natural state.

F. Discussion of Problems and Objections by Other Agencies and the Public

For many years the battleground has lain idle with a very minimum of development. There has been no interpretation on the site to tell the story of the final battle of Chief Joseph. Interested citizens from Chinook and other parts of the state have expressed themselves many times of the need for the preservation and enhancement of the site. There has also been an interest on the part of the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service in the proper development of the area.

The developments are planned to answer the interests of the public and federal agencies.

V. Benefits

The final battleground of the Nez Perce war of 1877 and the surrender field, where Joseph vowed, "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever," are preserved at the Chief Joseph Battleground of the Bear's Paw. It was here that the final battle

culminated the 1700 mile retreat of a band of Nez Perce men, women, and children through some of the ruggedest country in the west. The project is designed to enhance the battleground and to tell the story of the retreat of the Nez Perce. Visitors to the site will have a better understanding and appreciation of this strenuous effort on the part of the Indians. Visits to the area will be informative and inspiring as visitors learn about these important events in Montana history.

VI. Summary Statement

The analysis of the environmental impacts on the developments proposed for the battleground indicate that they will be very minor. The random vehicular traffic will be eliminated and the site will benefit from proper operations and control. The public will benefit from visits to the battleground and will have a better appreciation and understanding of these events.

